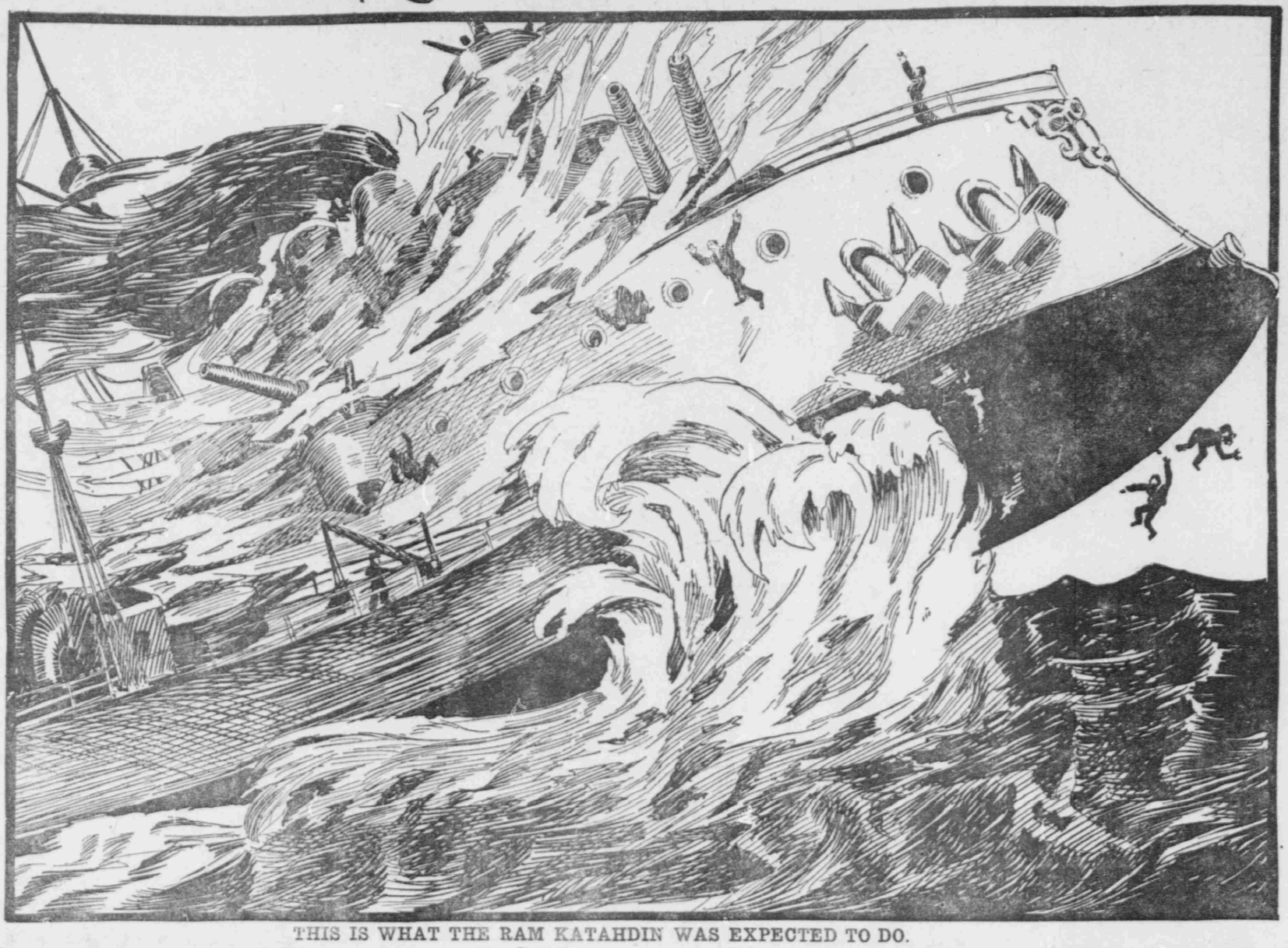
BUILT TO WRECK NAVIES, GOES TO JUNK HEAP WITHOUT TRIAL

Ram Katahdin, Only Fighting Vessel of Her Kind in the World and Which Has Been a Part of the United States Navy for the Last Ten Years, Although Endowed With Great Possibilities, Will Sink Into Oblivion Untried.



THIS IS WHAT THE RAM KATAHDIN WAS EXPECTED TO DO.

THE world is always anxious to know the outcome of an entirely new invention. "Will it stand the test?" is the question asked. That is the question which the world asked for many years in regard to the torpedo boat as a factor in naval warfare; the question was answered in the affirmative by Admiral Togo, in the ever-memorable battle of the Sea of Japan. This is the question which this nation and the entire world, at the beginning of the civil war, asked concerning John Ericsson's new ironclad boat, the Monitor; the answer was given in Hampton Roads in September, 1862. For the last fifteen years or more the same question has been asked in regard to a third form of vessel for use in sea fighting; the question has never been answered, and the chances are that it never will be.

The ram Katahdin, which now lies in the League Island navy yard, Philadelphia, and which the Government will probably soon order sold as old junk, is the only vessel of its kind that was ever built, either by this or any other nation. The idea of the ram for use in both land and sea fighting is older than the Christian era. The famous battering ram of the Roman army was hurled with such titanic force against the heavy walls of an opposing city that even the stoutest walls crumbled to rubble before its terrific blows. At the renowned battle of Salamis the Greeks used vessels to which were attached sharp-pointed iron rams to smash in the sides of the enemy's wooden ships. And the ram has been used in some form or other during nearly all the succeeding centuries.

Part of Navy Ten Years.

While many fighting vesels have had a projecting ram which could be used in connection with the guns, the ram Katahdin, which has been a part of the United States Navy for the last ten years, was the first vessel ever built for nothing but ramming purposes. Other vessels combined ramming as supplementary to, but not as the end and aim of, their fighting qualities. The Katahdin is a ram, and nothing but a ram. She has four small guns, but these are simply to repel the attacks of small torpedo boats. And now, without ever having been given a trial of her abilities as a fighter in battle, she will probably be sold as so much old iron.

It was on a cold day in February, the temperature 20 degrees below zero, when the Katahdin, after being duly christened with good champagne, glided slowly and smoothly into the wintry waters of the Maine coast. She lay there upon the icy waters like a great, whale, or like a gigantic submarine monster, and this resemblance was heightened by the fact that the vessel was painted a deep sea green. It was necessary to protect the Katahdin in every possible way against the attacks of the enemy, and so one of the ways which was adopted was a coat of paint which would render her almost invisible.

During the Spanish-American war it was thought, nay, fondly hoped, by all who were interested in this new and strange sea fighting power that an opportunity would be given to put to a practical test her vaunted ability to be secure against the attacks of the enemy, and at the same time able to demolish her foes. In March of 1898, the year of the war with Spain, the ram did get as far as Newport News, but there was no need of active service. Would she have brought her inventor, the late Rear Admiral Daniel Ammen, lasting fame, or would she have gone down to a watery grave of blasted hopes and defeat? Nobody can answer the question, and if the boat is sold one problem in naval warfare may never be answered.

The inventor did not see the device which was the result of many years of thought and effort given a trial, for he died in 1898, the very year when the success or failure of his work might have been proved. His invention was recently called a costly failure; and it is said that it has been costing the Government $3,000 every two years to keep the vessel in such a condition that it will not be eaten away with rust. The original cost of the vessel was nearly $1,000,000.

If there is anything in a name, the Katahdin is very appropriately named. Katahdin is a mountain in the northern part of Maine, and there are many Indian traditions connected with it. During the time of a heavy storm certain peculiar electrical effects were observed about the top of the mountain; and the Indians believed that it was the home of a terrible fire-breathing monster, with immense claws, which lived on the flesh of the human beings who came within its grasp. Like the monster which was supposed to infest the mountains, the deadly ram Katahdin, if once given the opportunity to dig its ponderous steel claw into the armored side of any vessel which comes in its way, would no doubt feed fat on the bodies of its unlucky victims. The Indians have passed away and with them all belief in the man-devouring monster of Mount Katahdin.

Vessel at First Rejected.

When the plans of this new species of war vessel were laid before the advisory board of the navy, that board recommended the building of five vessels of the Ammen ram type, but it was not until nearly ten years later that Congress finally passed an act authorizing the construction of one vessel. The Katahdin was ready for her trial trip, October 31, 1895. The contract called for a speed of seventeen knots, but in the official trial she made only 16.1146 knots. It had been confidently predicted by her inventor and by her builders, the Bath Iron Works, that she would easily make the required seventeen knots. The Bath Iron Works had previously received from the Government $95,000 as premiums for exceeding the required speed in the construction of the two gunboats, Machias and Castine; and the public naturally expected to see the builders make another success. The Katahdin was at first rejected by Mr. Herbert, then Secretary of the Navy; but Congress later passed a special act of acceptance, and the Katahdin became a part of our navy.

Daniel Ammen, the inventor of the Katahdin, entered the navy in 1842, and served continuously until he was retired in 1878. After being placed on the retired list, he devoted the rest of his life to various projects of one sort or another, which he thought would be for the good of his country. He wrote a most interesting book entitled "The Old Navy and the New" also an account of the naval operations along the Atlantic coast in the civil war, and numerous magazine articles, principally on naval affairs. A very useful invention which he made is the balsa, or life-saving raft, now used on nearly all American vessels. But the two great schemes of his life, the two things on which he spent many years of patient effort and thought, seemed doomed to meet with failure. One of these was the new type of war vessel, the Ammen ram Katahdin, the other the Nacaragua canal.

In the September number of Lippincott's Magazine for 1890, Admiral Ammen wrote as follows: "That the Nicaragua Canal will be constructed and without delay is assured by the facts just stated, which tell not the less why the Panama Canal proved a failure and will never be completed, if that word is regarded as applicable to a work that even as a lock canal has not at this time one-quarter of the work executed." The Panama Canal now seems to be an assured fact, and Admiral Ammen's years of effort spent in making surveys over the Nicaragua route, in writing pamphlets and magazine articles about the advantages of this route over others, in going as the representative of this Government to the Interoceanic Canal Congress, held in Paris in May, 1879, and in discussing the question with all the prominent men in the country, proved to be of no ultimate avail.

Lies Off League Island.

Like a great, flat-backed mud turtle, her brown back just protruding above the water, the Katahdin now lies in the back harbor at League Island, awaiting the orders of the Secretary of the Navy as to her final disposition, and the question then will be asked, "What would she have done had she ever had a chance to meet an enemy?"

In 1893, the very year in which the Katahdin was launched, a lesson was given to the world as to the power of the ram as a means of offense in the sinking of the British battleship Victoria and the loss of 321 officers and men, including the brave Admiral Sir George Tryon. A wrong order was given and the Camperdown, another vessel of the fleet, accidentally struck the Victoria almost at right angles with her ram, while traveling at a speed of six knots, moving the body of the Victoria sixty feet to port and plowing a rent ten feet long in her upper deck, making a hole which admitted an inflow of 3,000 tons of water per minute. The Victoria in a very few minutes turned keel up and sank with the loss of nearly all on board, including the commander of the British fleet.

Possibilities of Ram.

What havoc could a ram such as the Katahdin, traveling at a speed of nearly seventeen knots per hour, cause in a fleet on some dark night? Silently and unseen, almost covered with water, with only several small towers projecting above the dark surface of the water, the Katahdin creeps in among the fleet of the enemy, and before her presence can be made known several of the finest vessels are fast filling with water or sunk. It is an old sea axiom that no vessel can live in the trough of the sea during a heavy storm, but the Katahdin, it is claimed, is of such a shape that she can travel through the trough of the sea as well as head on. It is said that during one of the worst storms along the Atlantic coast some years ago, while other vessels were being pounded to pieces by the fury of the waves, those who were on board the Katahdin sat quietly at their dinner below deck unmindful of the storm and that not a glass of water on the table was disturbed.

The man who invented what might if put to the test prove to be one of the most useful and deadly of modern instruments of warfare was, like his boyhood playmate and lifelong friend, General Grant, interested in peace as well as in war, and a portion of his large estate, known as Ammendale, situated some twelve miles from Washington, he donated to the Christian brothers as grounds on which to erect a college and chapel for their quiet study and devotion. On a beautiful sloping Maryland hill stand these buildings with nothing about them to remind you of the inventor of the untried destroyer of mankind, the ram Katahdin.

Untried Ram Katahdin And Her Possibilities

Ram Katahdin, invented by late Rear Admiral Daniel Ammen.

First vessel built solely for ramming purposes. Original cost, $1,000,000.

Launched in 1893. Armament, four small guns.

Her speed, 17 knots.

In 1893 British vessel Camperdown, while traveling but 6 knots an hour, accidentally struck and sank battleship Victoria, of same fleet, moving body 60 feet to port and tearing a hole 10 feet long in her upper deck, admitting 3,000 tons of water.

Going at a rate of nearly three times the Camperdown's speed, the damage the Katahdin could have done as a ram may easily be imagined.

Insects As Skilled Mechanics

THE engineering capacity of the insects is infinitely greater, in proportion, than that of man. Long before man had thought of the saw, the saw fly had used the same tool, made after the same fashion and used in the same way, for the purpose of making slits in the branches of trees, so that she might have a secure place in which to deposit her eggs. The carpenter bee, with only the tools which nature has given her, cuts a round hole, the full diameter of her body, through thick boards, and so makes a tunnel by which she can have a safe retreat in which to rear her young.

These feats require a degree of instinct, which, in a reasoning creature would be called engineering skill, but none of them is as wonderful as the feats performed by the spider. A few years ago it was averred that a spider had suspended a mouse in the air and left it to perish. Certain physicists made great fun of this statement, but a well-known naturalist correspondent, while admitting that the story may not have been true, asserts that it had nothing impossible in it. It has come under his own observation, he says, that a spider actually raised a snake some distance from the ground notwithstanding the struggles of the reptile.

"The spider," he informs us, "is furnished with one of the most efficient mechanical implements known to engineers, namely a strong elastic thread. That the thread is strong is well known. Indeed, there are few substances that will support a greater strain than the silk of the silk worm or the spider, careful experiment having shown that for equal sizes the strength of these fibers exceeds that of common iron. But notwithstanding its strength, the spider's thread alone would be useless as a mechanical power if it were not for its elasticity. The spider has no blocks or pulleys, and, therefore, it cannot cause the thread to divide up and run in different directions; but the elasticity of the thread more than makes up for this and renders possible the lifting of an animal much heavier than a mouse or a snake. This is worth a little explanation.

"Let us suppose that a child can lift a six-pound weight one foot high with 350 rubber bands, each capable of pulling six pounds through one foot when stretched. Let these bands be attached to a wooden platform on which stand a pair of horses weighing 2,100 pounds, or more than a ton. If now the child will go to work and stretch these ruber bands singly, hooking each one up, as it is stretched, in less than twenty minutes he will have raised the pair of horses one foot.

"We thus see that the elasticity of the rubber bands enables the child to divide the weight of the horses in 350 pieces of six pounds each, and at the rate of a little less than one every three seconds, he lifts all these separate pieces one foot, so that the child easily lifts this enormous weight. Each spider's thread acts like one of the elastic rubber bands."

SOME RISKS ATTENDANT UPON NIGHT BANKING

NIGHT banking seems now to be an established fact in New York, which, in its business as well as its pleasure, is gradually losing all sense of the curfew, says the New York Evening Post. The sight of brilliantly lighted counting houses with men within taking in and paying out money at all hours of the night quickly ceased to be a novelty—in fact, night banks are rapidly becoming as matter of fact as are the brilliantly lighted evening schools, which, no doubt, had an uncanny look to the New Yorker of a previous generation, when the only other brilliant thing at night was the apothecary's shop, which itself closed early and relied on the ever-present "night bell" for late attacks of indigestion. Of course, the owl wagon was in evidence for the belated appetite. But now, only the country cousin regards as strange the night bank, and the New Yorker long ago has classed along with the all-night restaurants, all-night dentists, late barber shops, and perpetual drug stores an institution which will minister to his late financial distress.

Three of these night banks are already in existence—one in Fifth avenue, where the fashionables congregate at late hours; a second on Sixth avenue, on the edge of the theater belt, and the third located appropriately on Times square—that strange little twenty-four-hour community where there is pretty nearly everything all the time except sleep. Two others are immediately projected—one downtown for late newspaper workers; the others in middle Broadway.

And in this ministration to those who wish to be wakeful, the night banks of New York are but another step in the progress against all that pertains to sleep—part of a great night system which threatens physique, and makes young men look old in their early thirties. But the banks are not responsible. It is the night life which is responsible for the bank. If huge business is being transacted all around the bank, it means large sums of money taken in over the cashier's counter. And what is to be done with these sums—shall they be left in the little shop which does a large business between the end of the ordinary banking hours and 7 p. m.? No—there are burglars and night fires even in New York. And the cashier of the bar, restaurant, or theater is not too anxious to keep in his little safe several thousand dollars which have come in since 8 o'clock at night. To these the night bank is a way out, and so in the early evening the small storekeeper who could not leave his shop before comes in to leave his money, or the servant who could not leave her mistress during the day drops in to buy a draft on Ireland or what-not place where old folks are. And later come the theaters and restaurant men, glad to deposit and so be rid of the huge night receipts of their concerns. Possibly, this facility makes for calmer sleep for those who are thus freed from responsibility.

Then, occasionally, appears the man who has run short of cash—to pay for his supper, to make a late bet, possibly to close some deal consummated over the dinner table. He needs money immediately, and instead of having to borrow from friends, goes to his bank and draws from his rainy-night pile, so to speak.

But there are limitations in night banking, just as there are limitations in day business—you can get a photograph taken at night, but it will be by artificial light, and not exactly the real daytime likeness. So there is a difference between day and night banking—for there are dangers in night banking not common to the daytime. The night bank, therefore, as a general rule, limits its transactions to its actual customers—cashes checks for its depositors when they present them in person, but withdraws its daytime cordiality to third parties who want checks cashed at night, and becomes very chary of accepting paper of others than the owners of the cash. And there is reason for this conservative attitude toward those outside of its family of depositors. There is the fear of the "stopped check," truly the night banker's bete noir. For the stopped check loves the night bank better than the day.

This and other difficulties probably explain why the banks joined the long procession of night industries so late in the game. And even now, because of these pitfalls, night banking remains far more conservative than its parent, which sticks to the old-school hours. Every night transaction is scrutinized with special watchfulness, probably because the old middle-age suspicion of night, with its robber bands and its Turpins, has not been entirely dispelled even by the day-like glare of the electric light, and the increase in the city watch. Night still has about it a reminiscence of the marauder.

Of the dangers of non-conservative night banking, Richard A. Furdy, manager of the Times Square branch of the Mechanics and Traders' Bank, said the other night: "The moment a night bank attempts to do a regular day business in the evening, and to cash checks for other than depositors, it enters on a very dangerous practice. For a bank which cashes a check for a third party after banking hours is in danger of finding, next day, that the check has been stopped by the payer before the regular hour of opening. Here is a possible transaction along these lines:

"A depositor in a night bank, Mr. Smith, after banking hours, gives John Doe a check for goods to be delivered not later than 7 p. m. If Doe could cash that check at once, he might get the money and fail to deliver the goods. Smith, before banking hours next morning, stops the check. The bank, however, had cashed it the night before. Who would lose the money? At any rate, such a transaction would involve both bank and customer in a troublesome lawsuit."

Poor Misunderstood Filipinos

WRITING to a friend in Boston, Joaquin Fertich, a leader of the Independence party, says:

"If love for good order and morality are qualities which especially characterize nations predestined to be great in history, then, my dear sir, the Philippines are surely called to become in time a great nation.

"To prove my assertion you only have to remember how few police officers are necessary to maintain good order here in towns of as many as 10,000 to 15,000 inhabitants. There are towns in this province which have not more than four police officers, whose only weapon is their baton, and yet good order in these places is not disturbed.

"But even with these favorable conditions, I had been of the opinion that the moment had not actually come yet for assuming that heavy burden which must accompany the attainment of the supreme and constant aspiration of all nations.

"Our great necessities on one hand, our limited resources on the other and the critical situation which the Philippine archipelago is passing through in general had convinced me that in order to be able to maintain our independence we lacked the economic basis that is the cornerstone on which the prosperity and happiness of a nation reposes.

"Entertaining this idea, I had found no other solution than a wise although short evolution so as to allow the people time to recover from its prostration and to avail itself of the school of experience just as the fruit forms and ripens while still hanging from the tree.

"But unexpected circumstances which I need not enlarge upon here have convinced me that the death of our cherished and universal aspirations would result from this revolutionary process.

"Above all, my dear sir, I have convinced myself that the protective system which prevails in the United States is incompatible with the economic progress of our country.

"I have convinced myself that beneath another flag which is not that of our nation, our agriculture, our commerce, and our business cannot flourish, because no country, however noble and unselfish it may be, will even consent that its protege ever should become an economic nightmare in its path.

"To aspire to independence by means of evolution is to try to form a nation after the pattern of another, and this is a long and difficult process, if not an utterly impossible one. I have also convinced myself that those who speak of the incapacity of the Philippine nation confound that which is essential with that which is purely accidental. While some among us advocate evolution as a means of instructing and educating the people, in fact the only thing we need is that protection from without which guarantees our nationality so as to avoid the danger of international ambition, because as regards social and moral education we have as much of it as many European nations. The proof is found in the criminal statistics of the country.

"We have money enough to maintain a better and less expensive government than that very costly one which is trying to make the people what the Government wants it to be, and not to make itself what the people want and expect, dictating laws one day which next day are canceled and changed in a thousand places and in a thousand ways, so that justice is converted into a mere Babel."